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Recommended Citation

Bornstein, Rita and Zhang, Wenxian, "Interview with Dr. Rita Bornstein: Thirteenth President of Rollins College" (2010). *Oral Histories*. Paper 1.

<http://scholarship.rollins.edu/oralhist/1>

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Interview with Dr. Rita Bornstein: Thirteenth President of Rollins College

Thursday, May 20, 2010

Wenxian Zhang, Alia Alli & Jennifer Ritter

WZ: Good afternoon, today is Thursday, May 20, 2010, and my name is Wenxian Zhang, Head of Archives and Special Collections. With me are two students, Jennifer Ritter and Alia Alli. We're going to interview Dr. Rita Bornstein, thirteenth president of Rollins. So, Dr. Bornstein, tell us about your childhood. I understand that you are a New York native.

RB: I am. As you know they say you can take the person out of New York, but you can't take New York out of the person. In fact, when I first got to Rollins, I was walking with my husband and we were coming from the College up at Park Avenue and I was starting to jaywalk, which we do in New York, and my husband said, "No, you can't do that anymore. You have to set an example - you have to be a model for your students." And so, yes, I was conscious of that after a while. I grew up in New York, and I've lived in Florida for most of my life. I lived in Miami for many years and went to college in Miami and came up here after that.

WZ: So you actually grew up in New York City?

RB: Uh, yes, until I was about sixteen.

WZ: So what made you decide to come to Florida?

RB: Well, I was – my mother actually decided to come and I followed her.

WZ: So, why did you decide to major in English? I understand that you went to Florida Atlantic University.

RB: I took two degrees in English Literature, because - why? Because I've always loved reading; I spent many, many, many happy days in my childhood in the library – the public library, which was around the corner from where I lived - It was on 79th Street, between 2nd and 3rd Avenue - and I just loved reading, so I grew up with that passion for reading and so it seemed like a natural thing. But then I switched when I did my Ph.D. I went in to educational leadership because I knew I wanted to do more than be a classroom teacher.

WZ: Yeah, so after you graduated from FAU, you became a high school teacher. Can you tell us about that experience?

RB: Interestingly, I actually met somebody just yesterday who was a student at the high school. I actually was part of a planning committee to establish an innovative high school in Miami. There was nothing else like it and this was in the early 70's – late 60's, early 70's. There was a lot of interest in changing what we called the 'factory model of education' where everybody went lockstep through school, K through 12. And so, there were lots of books written; lots of good, interesting consultants, and we adopted every innovation (laughs) that everybody talked about. We had differentiated staffing, so that not everybody was ... I was a team leader of a school within a school, the teachers had different designations, we had modular scheduling so

not every class was fifty minutes, we had an open floor plan so that people could move freely, and we believed in self-directed education so that students would take more responsibility for their education. Unfortunately, a lot of students were not ready for this kind of freedom and they began to call us Shopping Center High, because kids were hanging out at the shopping center next door. But, I wrote my dissertation about this experience and I really had - it was a very exciting time for me, because we were doing something new. The principal had handpicked all the teachers and it was the beginning of desegregation too, so black kids were bused in - so we had that issue. And I was one of the four senior administrators in the high school of thirty-six hundred students. So, it was a very heady time. And in my dissertation I created a new model for innovation and I'm sorry now that I didn't ever try to publish it - I should have.

WZ: You were also involved with the U.S. Department of Education. Tell us about that.

RB: Well, I decided that I didn't want to go back to the high school because it had become pretty traditional by the time I finished my Ph.D. - it was three or four years later - so I stayed at the University of Miami working for the Race Desegregation Assistance Center; this was a time of integration of the schools following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. And then I wrote for and won two major federal grants to establish a sex desegregation assistance center at the University of Miami and Sex Equity Project. These projects were to promote the acceptance and implementation of Title IX, and also to promote sex equity in schools. At the time, textbooks were biased, teacher behavior was biased, girls didn't do much in athletics and sports - there wasn't room for them - and in general, there was a real bias towards men and boys. And so, I spent many years going around to the Southeastern United States; I had eight states: Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and so on. (laughs) And if you think that I was a welcomed visitor all the time, I was not. "Who is this woman from Miami and what is she telling us? That Title IX is going to be good for us?" So it was a very interesting time, but it was exciting. Also, the high school because I was on the cusp of something new, innovative, important, and interesting.

WZ: So what inspired you to pursue your Ph.D. in Educational Leadership?

RB: I thought for a long time that I would go back to the public schools and move in to an administrative position - move in to the ranks of maybe the district - but when I finished my doctorate, my late husband said, "Why would you go back to the public schools?" So I stayed in higher education, but I was very interested in education as a force for promoting equality, promoting good citizenship, I was very passionate - I still am about education - but I wanted to be a leader so that's why I did that instead of just being a - I don't want to diminish it or demean it - but being a classroom teacher in English. But then, after I did this for a few years - you want me to tell you the next phase of my life?

WZ: Yes.

RB: I have all these phases (laughs). Ronald Reagan was elected president and he wasn't entirely sympathetic to civil rights issues and women's rights issues, and I was afraid they would wipe out the federal money, so I began to network around the country. I knew a lot of people from my sex equity Title IX work. What can I do now? You know, I would ask people to give

me advice. And a woman I didn't know, but who took me to lunch and was very nice, suggested that I look in to development or fundraising because it was just opening up for women; it had been a male dominated field. And she suggested that I talk to the vice president for development at the University, which I did. And a few months later, I was hired in a very lowly job. I took a huge pay cut, gave up my projects, and became Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations. I didn't know what I was doing because I didn't know a thing about development or fundraising. It wasn't that long – I came in to that job by '80, and by '85 I was the vice president for development. And that was a stepping stone to this job here.

WZ: You mentioned Dr. Bloland. Can you share with us his role in your life?

RB: I was divorced and I had two children and he came to the University of Miami and one day I was walking across the campus and he said to a colleague – he was a professor in the School of Education, but not one of my professors; I was done already- and he said to his friend Gene, "I'd love to meet that woman." (laughs) So Professor Gene said, "I know her. Rita, could you come over here?" And they invited me to have to coffee across the street in a restaurant, which I did, and Harland and I promptly forgot about this other guy and started talking and talking. And there were manatees swimming in the water near us and the rest is history. My first date with Harland was a fourteen mile bike ride in shark valley. There were lots of alligators but the woman he had taken before me had failed the test – it was a test. She was like "Ohh alligators, ohhh" and fourteen miles seemed a lot to her. But anyway, yeah that's how I met him. (laughs)

WZ: Yeah, I still remember him doing the research in the upstairs in the library. I didn't know him well, but in the late 90s he was a frequent visitor to the Olin Library.

RB: Well, what happened when I started here - and we'll go back to talk about how I got here – he was teaching still at the University of Miami and he would go back and forth, but it was very difficult. He'd fly down, he had two days of teaching, and then he'd fly back, and sometimes if I needed him on a Wednesday, he'd come back and then go back. So he did this for about a year and a half and then he retired; he was eight years older than I am, anyway. And he actually published more after he retired – and a very important work on post-modernism in higher education – than he had his whole career. So he made very good use of his time, which is why when anyone says to me, Professors are lazy, I say, "There may be a few, but most of them are doing this work because they love it, and here there are lots of examples, but here is one where he had no need to publish anymore but he did it because he loved to work." I remember when I first got here, he sat in a faculty colloquium and he always took notes – wherever he went, he took notes (laughs) – they thought that he was reporting on them to me. (laughter) But anyway, you may want to know how I got here.

WZ: Yes, tell us how you got here. (laughter)

RB: The reason that I really was able to get into the pool - I never thought of myself as a college president; I did not look to it as a career opportunity, I didn't think about it - but one of the people who was on the search committee and who had been a member of the board here and then was asked to rejoin the board so he could be on the search committee was Charlie Rice, and he was also on the board of the University of Miami. So he knew me very well and he called me

one day and said, "Why don't you apply for this presidency?" I said, "Oh, okay." So, he asked me to send him my vita first, which I did – my resume – and he told me to put my husband and children in it so I would look like a married woman, which was important. And then he said, "Well, I've got you in to the search, but" he said, "Now you're on your own, completely on your own," which was appropriate. And that's how I got into the search and Allan Keen chaired the search committee and was very good about staying in touch with me. And they hired me.

JR: Can you tell us a little about your experience during the search?

RB: That's a very good question. It was very interesting. I had only two interviews with the search committee – one at the airport and one here – but then I came back and did a full scale interview with everybody in the world, which I'll talk about in a minute, but I thought the first one – what they call the airport interview – was okay, it wasn't great, but it wasn't terrible. And when I was asked to come back to another interview I came here to the College and I stayed at, I don't know if it was Park Plaza – where was I staying? Maybe it was. No, it was the Bed and Breakfast across the street – I took a walk at night – the first night – around the campus and I called my husband and I said, "I can't go there. It is so rundown." I said, "It's very beautiful, but the grass is terrible, and the buildings are not in good shape." I said "they don't take care of this place." That was my first impression, and it was Spring Break, so there were no people around. But that interview went extremely well, and I enjoyed the people on the committee; there were two students and I think two alumni, and a number of trustees and four professors, and I just enjoyed them all. And actually, then they came down – not all of them, but several of them, a couple of professors and trustees came down – and saw me in my environment and wanted to talk to various people. And the professors talked to their counterparts there – and I was – I think I was well liked by the professors at Miami, and that was very, very good for me, for my legitimacy, because after all, I was fundraiser, not a traditional scholar, and I wasn't provost and I wasn't a dean. So then I came back for this, you know, gigantic meeting; I met with faculty, and I met with students, and I met with everybody. And I loved that, that was wonderful, and I fell in love with the place.

Actually, during the months before I came, I was in the Archives – I studied everything; I knew more about Rollins than anybody here when I came up for the interview. One of our students who was a senior at the time had chained himself and some others to a fence at one of the corporations here. I don't know if it was Lockheed Martin or – one of them – but because they were building military material and there may have been some plutonium – I don't really remember anything – but I thought, "Oh, it's an interesting campus – activist students! (laughs) Look at this, I am going to enjoy that." That was the last major student thing like that, but anyway, I thought it was very interesting. But I had never heard of Rollins before. I had gotten into the search, and I asked one of the people at Miami about what he knew about it because he was a native Floridian. "Oh," he said – hm what did he call it? "Oh, Jolly Rolly Colly" – that's what we used to call it if you went to high school here." And I said, "What? Jolly Rolly Colly? Oh my God." So it didn't sound very auspicious to me. But here I am.

WZ: So you became the thirteenth president of Rollins College – the first woman president. So what are some of the challenges that you faced after Thad Seymour stepped down. I understand that he used to be very popular around campus.

RB: Thad was very popular with students; I think less so with faculty. I was not only a woman, I was a Jewish woman; nobody really talked about that - but that was - and a fundraiser, so it was kind of three very unusual characteristics. And it was difficult for me at first because the head of the alumni association, who worked for the College - like we have now - and a number of alumni were very, very uneasy and suspicious of me and I got phone calls and letters saying you'll never be accepted in the community here, you'll never raise any money here, almost saying why you don't go home. You know, it was pretty ugly, but there was also a lot of support. And then being a woman and my husband being a man (laughs) nobody knew what to expect of him, you know. Polly Seymour was in the tradition of a female first lady, if you will, and so she hosted tea parties and she did a lot of the social activities for the president. But my husband was not able to do it; he was a scholar, and because he was a man nobody expected anything of him, so in that way, it made his life easier for not having those responsibilities - but he went everywhere with me. It was years before I said you don't have to go to this event anymore. He hated some of it (laughs) and I won't mention which ones - the annual interminable events. But so that was another way I was unusual, but it was a bit of an uphill climb and then faculty would say to me, when are you going to start raising money? You know, so it was that expectation, so it was a very complicated time. My husband used to say, "How do you always know what to do?" And I think that was because of my maturity and my experience, because I did - I mean, I had a sense of what to do and how to do it. But it was, it was a challenge, just because I was different, and I loved the fact a few years in nobody thought of me as the woman president anymore, I was just the president. And, uh, that was a great moment. And, they were all wrong about my ability to raise money since we raised one *heck* of a lot of money from alumni and from the community.

WZ: Yeah, let's talk about the fundraising. You helped quadruple the College's endowment, how did you do that?

RB: (laughs) Well, I was very ambitious for the College, and I had a great mentor - the president at the University of Miami, who had pushed that board to be very ambitious about their campaign - and we had raised \$520 million at the University of Miami at a time when that was a huge amount of money. So when I came here and we started planning a campaign, I went to the board and I said, "We have to raise \$100 million." (laughs) I thought that they were going to collapse. I mean, Thad had run a campaign and it was about \$38 million, something like that. I said, "Rollins has all these ambitions, and dreams, and hopes, and potential, but no money. We can do this." And I didn't know if we could or not, but I was going to try. And before that, I had actually worked to strengthen the board. This was a pretty local board when I came - mostly Winter Park - and I went outside; I went to Downtown, Orlando, and got some of the top - the former mayor, Bill Frederick; and the head of SunTrust, Ted Hoepner; and so on, and also people from around the country - I asked and invited on the current chair of the board - Duane Ackerman, who was then at Bell South. So we had a very - we had improved the board so that it was more current, more connected, and more helpful. And we lost a couple of members when I announced that I wanted to do this big campaign, but most of them stuck with it. And so we raised \$160.2 million, and half of it came from alumni. And one of the staff members here, Elizabeth Brothers - I don't know if you knew her - who had done the planned giving, she said to me when I came, "Rita, the alumni at Rollins love the College, but they won't give you any

money.” Half of our \$160 million came from alumni, and you know what? When I sat down with them, they would say nobody ever asked us.

So we did very well, and I focused on endowed chairs because I was very interested in building up the faculty, and scholarships for students, and buildings. We built upward of twenty-five – or renovated upwards of twenty-five buildings – and brought in over twenty-five endowed chairs. So, we built the endowment – this was all without George Cornell’s final legacy. And I got the first chair for a college presidency that was in the country from Mr. Cornell. (laughs) At the beginning of the campaign I used to call the faculty together and make an announcement. “We got \$1 million from the, uh, whatever, for this and that purpose.” Ah, and everybody was so excited. And then after a while they got jaded - “Oh, oh,” because we had so many gifts. And every year we had a new building going up or that was being renovated and everybody was inconvenienced because of the parking we had to take away – we had to take away some of the parking. I said, “Just wait next year,” and it was very exciting, and I loved architecture and design, so I spent a lot of time (laughs) sitting in chairs for the campus center with the students – we had a group of students, and me, and George Herbst - and we were trying out the chairs. And I was looking at the designs and I actually think I made a difference. We had an architect who was working on expansion of the business school and the first designs came in with the business school expansion over the whole – sitting over the pathway. Now, Rollins has two important axes, one up from the Mills Building –straight up Interlochen, and then East-West on Holt Avenue – and this would have encroached on the North-South axis. I said, “No, absolutely not. Go back to the drawing boards.” And aren’t we glad? And then, you know the Mary Jean Mitchell Plaza? That, when they first showed me the design, had a whole fencing – a brick fencing – cover the whole place, so it looked a little like a ship’s mass front, so there were no stairways in between; you’d have to go around. So I changed that. And my last big thing was the garage across the street. They originally designed it with these stairwells enclosed and I said, “I’m not going to have women students going down enclosed stairwells at night. They have to be open.” And so they did, and so I’m proud of those little things like that.

JR: I understand Mr. Cornell made a surprise donation towards what you thought had been, you know, the campaign capstone surprise donation of \$10 million. Can you tell us about what it was like?

RB: That was uh, at the campaign, you mean; yes. In fact, I’m not sure but I think that might’ve been the – there’s one event – there’s a wonderful picture of where I’m on my knees on the floor. Mr. Cornell was a very small man and he was sitting, and he told me he was going to make this \$10 million gift to put us over the top, and I dropped to my knees so I could look him in the eyes and say thank you. I think that’s the gift that he set up scholarships for, in his wife’s – in his late wife’s – name. And, now George Cornell, you want to talk about George?

WZ: Yes.

RB: (laughs) George was very interesting. You know, I gave a talk recently where I was talking about how a small college secured a \$100 million gift, and the first thing I said about how you do something like that is takes a village. This relationship with Mr. Cornell had gone way back in the College’s history. Jack Critchfield, the president before Thad, had asked his alumni director, “Don’t we have any rich graduates?” because the College was always so poor, and the alumni

guy knew about George and so I think he brought him on the board – Jack Critchfield I believe – and he made his first donation to the museum. And then Thad Seymour came along and spent a lot of time with George. He and Polly took them on the boat on the lake whenever they came here and visited, and just really spent a lot of time in developing the relationship. And then when I came, my husband and I spent lots and lots of time. George was a little suspicious of me being a Jewish woman. And it so happened that the chairman of the board at the University of Miami was a big fan of mine, and he had lived in Central Valley where Mr. Cornell grew up – well actually vice-versa, George was an adult and Jim McLamore was a child there – and so, Jim McLamore called them to say I was great and that they should accept me. And (laughs) he said “Little Jimmy McLamore called me,” and that’s how they remembered him. But we got to be as close as you could be, because he was a man of few words, and she was quite garrulous – talkative – and they were different from us, but when you’re in the presidency, you spend a lot of time with people who you might not normally have as close friends, but they are important to the College.

And you know, every once in a while, George would say to me, “My advisors are suggesting that I set a foundation.” And I would say, “Oh, George, you know if you do that, you have no children, it’ll be run by your trust officer, your lawyer, your banker, and then when they pass on, other people, whom you don’t know, and they may not follow your wishes, they may not be interested in what you’re interested in. So I don’t think for you, it doesn’t sound like a great idea.” And we had this conversation (laughs) over the many years, and I’m happy to say that he never did, and that when he died, he left money to Cornell University and to various things in Delray Beach, the Morikami Museum, and a dog run, but most of his money, he left to Rollins, which was his Alma Mater. So I think it was very appropriate and has enabled us to transform the College. I might not have retired so early if I knew George was going to die the year after I left, but Lewis has had the benefit of lots of money to spend on lots of things. I had really spent a lot of time talking to George about the importance of endowed chairs and scholarships, so those were two things that were specified in his bequest. So that was a very interesting time, but a lot of people participated in that. Dave Erdman, whenever he went down there, we had him visit with George, faculty members, like Mike Strickland - it does take a village to keep connected to an important donor.

WZ: That’s great. So besides George, there were also other major donors. Can you share with us some of the other people that you worked, with like Alfond, like Rice...

RB: Well, (laughs) I have funny stories about each of them. With the Alfonds, they were very good about inviting Harland and me to stay with them up in Maine – they have a camp they call it where their family, sort of like a Kennedy compound – where many parts of their family lived. So they included us in a lot of activities, and when I wanted to build the Alfond Sports Center, I figured well, Mr. Alfond would be a great choice to give us a lead gift. And his son Ted, who is now on the board, was working with me on this, and I mean, it took several years. I would sit down with Harold, and I would say, “Harold, we really need this. We have just this box for basketball.” “Ask my son,” he said. “He’s the graduate.” So he kept putting me off, and putting me off. But finally he agreed with Teddy - his son - and Barbara, to do the lead gift, but it was an \$11 million project – well it got to be – and they only – well not only – but they gave just a part of that, but we had a rule that I followed that we would never put the shovel in the ground on any project until the money was raised, and we would never go in to the endowment for money

for a project, that we would raise it all. But somewhere along that process, Mr. Alfond called me and he said, "Rita! If you don't build that thing soon, I'm going to be dead!" He lived to be in his nineties. So I went to the board, and I said, "Listen, we have this policy, I know, it's an important policy, but you know, Mr. Alfond has been so good to the College; I think we should go ahead. We will raise the rest of the money." And we did, but that was the first time we broke ground before all the money was pledged. (laughs)

And there was Charlie Rice, who I was very close to, and I wanted a campaign gift from him, and I solicited him for the Alfond Sports Center because he was very involved in sports and so were his family members. And he said: let me think about it, and he came back and he said he wanted to do the project that was the bookstore, which we converted the old student center from. And that was because his mother was an English teacher and he loved books, which you know, was a surprise to me. But somewhere in the process he said to me, "Now, are you sure that books are not going to be obsolete, that everything is going to computers and this won't be a bookstore in the future?" And I said, "I don't know (laughs), we will always have books; we love books. We may have electronic ways of reading too, but we'll always have books." Now I'm beginning to wonder (laughs). Was it the Stanford library that I think just decided to eliminate all its books? But, so have the Rice Family Bookstore and Café.

Let's see, and then the music building addition and the Tiedtke Hall. I was sitting at a board meeting one day - at an executive committee meeting, and I always talked about our fundraising needs when I gave my report; I used to give a report about everything that was happening with student life and faculty and I always had a few words about fundraising. And Mr. Tiedtke was sitting beside me - he was about ninety-five when he died, this was a few years before he died, very hard of hearing - and I said, "Well, we need \$750,000 before we can start to build the addition on the back of the music building. And he said, "What?!" (laughs) He said, "Well, suppose you had that \$750,000, when would you start?" I said, "I'd put the shovel in the ground tomorrow, John." He'd already made a big pledge to the music building. "Alright, alright, I'll do it." (laughs) That's the advantage of talking about fundraising all the time. So we went on with the meeting; we were all applauding, we were very excited, and at some point I got up and I went around the table to the development vice president and I said, "Cynthia, go get a pledge form, he could die on the way to the car." (laughs) Well, you know, he was older and I wanted that in writing. He was wonderful; he actually funded a parking lot here. Who funds a parking lot? But he loved the school; he was not a graduate. So there were lots of stories, but you know the whole time I was raising money, I was also running the College, and I was writing, and publishing, and speaking, which I've always done; every job I've had - every project I've been involved with - I've always generated something in writing, and I think some of that you have and you'll get the rest of it. But I mean, even before that, I had books. When I was teaching and administering in high school I wrote a curriculum guide: *Man Between War and Peace*. After that I wrote *An Interdisciplinary Studies to War-Peace Studies* and it was replenished in a 2004 book; can you believe that? And then when I was doing Title IX, I published a lot on that subject, and then in development I published chapters and so on, and then as the president I published things too. That's sort of my professional life. Thank goodness my children were grown by the time I got here to do this work. So you know, it wasn't just fundraising; people think of me as a fundraiser, yes, but there was a whole lot of, you know, the presidency. The way I describe a presidency is that it has to be integrated so that if you - if I heard a professor who was teaching a very exciting class, I would ask if I could sit in that class. Then if I was going to lunch with a prospect, I had something to talk about that, about regarding

the institution, so that was a way I looked at an integrated approach to the presidency - which I loved.

WZ: Okay, before you get into your research and publications, I think there are a few more major buildings. Your years represented a major period in the College's history in terms of campus construction. You mentioned several of them: SunTrust Plaza, there's Barker's Presidential House, and then the Cornell Student Center, and the Cornell Fine Arts Museum.

RB: And, part of the Olin Library- The Norm Copeland Tennis Stadium, funded by Duane Ackerman. We also built the SunTrust Plaza and Garage and purchased a number of properties including the Sutton Place Apartments.

WZ: Yes, yes...

RB: The electronic section, and the Soccer Field, and Barker Stadium over there, and oh and the museum – the expansion of the museum, what else?

JR: McKean gateway-

RB: McKean gateway, that's right – the parking lot, um, yea, a lot of projects – oh, and the admission center across the center – the Rinker Building. It was so much fun. Every time we had a dedication or a ground breaking, we made a big fan-fare about it, and everybody came and it was great.

WZ: Yeah, I attended a few of them; it was very impressive. (laughs) So, any stories behind those projects?

RB: Yeah, well one of them that – The Cornell Campus Center was the most important project – I mean this library expansion came first – but that was – because sequentially it happened first – but that was the most needed thing; we needed a living room for the campus and a better place for the students. All we had was a big box; it was Skillman Hall for eating, and it was pretty awful, and that space between the dining hall and the Mills Building was terrible; it was degraded and the ground was rutted and there was a kiosk of flyers – oh, it was terrible.

And so, I was really excited when we were dedicating that. Now we had a ceremony and everybody in my division and everybody else thought that George Cornell would not want to say anything because he was so shy and quiet. But I had an experience at the University of Miami at a dedication where the president did not call on the donor to speak because he said, "Jimmy Knight is a man of few words, so we won't invite him to say anything, but let me just - "and he went on and did all the talking, and later I found out that this man, who was of the Knight Ridder newspaper publication business, had a 3x5 card in his pocket with notes that he was going to read from, so I knew you couldn't make that assumption. So, we didn't actually plan this, but I was at the podium, and at some point, I turned to George, and I said, "Mr. Cornell, would you like to say a few words?" "Yes, I would," he said. So he got up, had a piece of paper in his pocket, and he was very eloquent; he didn't speak long, and he talked about Rollins as a friendly

place – a neighborhood – and he hoped that this building would add to its – to that spirit,” and that was all and that was wonderful, I felt so good about it.

There was another story (laughs) about the museum expansion. The museum, you know, is called the Cornell Fine Arts Museum and we were sitting behind it outdoors at a party for Sam Lawrence, who was a very generous donor to the College also – that’s right, we purchased the property across the street with Sam’s support– that was my first gift to the campaign I bought from the Resolution Trust Corporation; you know that big piece of property that Rollins is on – on Interlochen and New England where we have the Hamilton Holt School and we own the -

WZ: - the Lawrence Center-

RB: Yeah, the Lawrence Center - and that building there. But, so Sam was a big donor; he was Barbara Alford – he is Barbara Alford’s father. But so, we were sitting at a party for Sam and he had given many paintings of value to the museum and I had been trying to get Mr. Cornell to give another gift to the museum so that I could expand it, because we were very tight, and again, it was hard to get these gifts – George was procrastinating and so I turned to him at dinner – we were sitting at a round table; his wife was there, and he was there, and I was there – and I said, “George, you know I’ve been thinking, I hope you wouldn’t mind, but I might ask Sam to make a donation to get us going on this museum expansion. We would put his name on the wing over there. (laughs) And George said, “I’ll do it!” (laughs) He didn’t want anybody else’s name on the building. So, I went over to Sam and asked if he minded if I made such an announcement, and that was wonderful, and that’s how we got started on that museum expansion.

WZ: So...

RB: Oh, and Tom Johnson -

WZ: Yes.

RB: Tom Johnson you know did the –

WZ: the Learning Center-

RB: - the Learning Center - and um, well, see I got a lesson about foundations from him, which I applied to Mr. Cornell. But Charlie Rice and I had gone to see – Tom, when I came to Rollins, he had been on the board for sixty years, which is a long time - he started when he was student – and he told us - we were trying to get another gift from him – but he said, “Well there is going to be a lot of money in my estate, and I’m setting up a foundation, but my sons know what my priorities are and one of them is Rollins College.” And we had talked about an endowed director for the museum and some other things, but see that didn’t happen because he did not put that in writing. And that’s what happens sometimes when you have a foundation and it’s not clear or you think it’s clear but it’s not. Anyway, but I loved Tom. He was a wonderful, wonderful guy. I shouldn’t have told that story.

WZ: Yeah, so another major undertaking besides fundraising, you really raised the academic standards. You mentioned about the endowed chair. Can you talk about some of your efforts in that area?

RB: When I first came I was really – how shall I say it nicely – a little concerned that the standards for promotion and tenure were modest, so I put together a committee and asked them to look in to it and to compare with other institutions and to see if we could raise the standards for tenure and promotion. I put together a number of committees when I got here; one was a strategic planning committee which I chaired and this committee and several others. But this was a real challenge and Ed Cohen and Laura Grayson were on that committee, and they kept threatening to quit (laughs) because it was so difficult to get agreement. You know, this is the heart of a professor's life, but I wouldn't let them quit. I said we have got to stay with this, and in the end they did work with the faculty and the standards were strengthened. We - you know - we keep improving that as we go along, but that was a good start to this process. And because I - we were so poor when I came, the endowment was about \$37 or 38 million, that when we got an endowed chair – or any other gift – I used it for internal purposes; I offset the budget, so I gave a number of chairs to people who were on the faculty who deserved it. And I think that helped also raise the self-esteem, and the ambition, and the productivity of the faculty. I believe in this faculty - I've always – I am very close to the faculty even now and think they are the heart of the institution. The students come and go, presidents come and go, but faculty are pretty stable.

AA: What are some of the memories that you have of the faculty over the years?

RB: Um, well, oh yeah, (laughs) lots of things, like when are you going to start raising money for us? That was one thing they carried on about until I started, and they got over that. And then Socky O'Sullivan, one year – I think it was something that he put in the *Sandspur* – he wrote something which said, "She's spending – how much is she spending per square foot of grass?" - or something like that - "Rita is spending so much money on grass, and that is money that we need for other things," but I found that by beautifying the campus - and we did it in a way using Florida materials, you know, what do they call it? Stet. And other kind of grass and so on – it made a difference. Faculty said, Oh you know, this place is beautiful, it's wonderful to work here. So they got over that. And then – well this is not a faculty member – but I'll just tell you. When I did the rose garden for Mrs. Nelson right outside my window, students got upset. Oh, she's putting a rose garden by her window and we need scholarships and we need computers. I said, "She gave us \$10 million guys, don't you think she deserves some memorial?" So that was called Rita's Rose Garden for a while. But the faculty – I also enjoyed them through the colloquy that we had and I enjoyed a sort of sparring with the faculty at faculty meetings too, because it was intellectually interesting.

WZ: Tell us about the colloquy in 1997.

RB: Well, I was very intrigued by the connection with John Dewey and the work that Hamilton Holt had done with Dewey here and the importance of that conference that they had in the 30s to thinking about higher education. So, I co-organized this thing with the College Board and it was a very exciting conference, "Toward a Pragmatic Liberal Education: The Curriculum of the Twenty-First Century." The only thing is that we didn't do a good enough job getting Rollins

people involved, and the provost was only marginally interested in it, so it didn't have the turnout, and we didn't have the students, and I was not as secure about how it was going to work out as they were – when they did the last one – and I didn't pay anybody to come like Lewis did when he had the big colloquy here. But it was a very exciting time; most of the people we had – the professionals that we had – were higher education people and some liberal arts people. It was a fantastic group of participants and they all stayed for the three – I think it was three days, or whatever it was – and we had constant conversations about the issues and unfortunately not enough Rollins people came – I know some of them were on the program – but it was one of the most important conversations one could have had as the College Board book, *Education and Democracy* points out, and I think a lot came out of it. I read things now – but there's a lot of work that's gone on since then, and the people who were here – Knefelkamp and a couple others from there have taken this work on. Lee Shulman keeps writing about how liberal arts can benefit from the professional programs and how they can be integrated. So that's all stuff that came out of this conference and it was the most extraordinary thing and we did stream it online, but the book is the best testament to the exciting conversations that went on. It was really important.

WZ: You also wrote an article on the college president as public intellectuals; tell us about your academic life here. We wonder how you can manage it.

RB: (laughs) I keep working, even now, and because my husband was an academic we would both worked a lot, whether if I was free on weekends or nights. And I do believe that presidents both have to care about what they say – you know, careful – not to harm the institution, careful not to get too embroiled in controversial issues that might damage relationships with donors, and politicians – it's a very complicated role. At the same time, I believe there is a public role for college presidents and that they need to exercise the beliefs that they have when they can. And yet, its complicated – I mean, you've got all these talking heads today and it's a lot of noise out there, and so the president who is sane and who wants to give both sides of an issue and talk about an issue may not be heard – but I think there is an important role for presidents to speak up and to take a public role in some of the important issues in K-12 education, about higher education, about even war and peace issues, although that's a little dicey too. I suppose a college president would have trouble coming out and saying I don't believe we should be in Afghanistan or Iraq because there are plenty of people who don't like that – so it's always a trade off, but still I think there are issues in which I think you can speak and should speak.

WZ: Do you want to tell us about some of your research and writings? So I just pulled some of these (points to books Bornstein has authored) and this has become a topic of your interest –

RB: - I'm passed that now, now I am writing a book on fundraising –

WZ: Oh, wonderful –

RB: - for presidents. I'm the kind of person that has to keep busy.

WZ: This is -

RB: Oh that's my magnum opus -

WZ: Yes, tell us about this project.

RB: Well, the book *Legitimacy in the Academic Presidency: From Entrance to Exit* – it actually has quite a life. It's being used still in graduate classes; a lot of aspiring presidents read it, presidents who are new to the job read it - I keep getting this feedback - various associations use it, and Roger has been deeply into it as he goes off to be a president. It's work that combines scholarship with anecdotes and includes some of my own experiences to illuminate the points I'm trying to make. But that's not the heart of it, and I have interviews that I did, so I think it's got a lot of – its meaty – its got a lot of stuff in there and it's theoretical – you know I set up a series of constraints about legitimacy arguing that a president needs legitimacy to be successful and to survive. And when I came – so this probably grew out of my own experience – I didn't have legitimacy because of the deficiencies - if you will – of being a woman and Jewish, and a fundraiser. They may have been positive attributes later, but at the time they undermined my quest for legitimacy. And women in general, and minorities in general, have a more difficult time gaining legitimacy, being accepted as a good fit with the institution and a good leader, which is how I would define legitimacy. But I think even a traditional white male coming from a provostship has to establish legitimacy, and this book is meant to say what are the elements of legitimacy, and what are the obstacles to legitimacy.

WZ: Can you talk about working with the students. I know that you had a very popular pancake program, line dance was popular. But more importantly, I think that the students – the quality of students – at the institution had improved substantially under your leadership.

RB: (laughs) Thank you, yeah, I had an annual square dance. I tried so hard to make that an annual event because I always wanted to tie everything back to the history of the College, and I noticed that President McKean and his wife Jeanette used to do square dancing with the students and I just loved the idea. And I had done a lot of folk dancing and square dancing when I was a girl, so every year around Founders Day we'd have our square dance, and I had a caller who was great, And it never really took off; we always had some students, the student leadership did me a favor and came; and faculty, some faculty loved it and some staff; and my husband and I loved it, so we did it for a number of years, but it was not a huge success– I think a lot of student went, "Excuse me, a square dance?" But we did line dancing also and I was walking across campus once – I made a point to say hello to everybody because we went through periods where students were saying people are unfriendly here – and I tried to encourage students and faculty and staff to say hello to each other – look them in the eye, don't just look down– so Dick Trismen was with me, he was the college's attorney – and he said, "How do you know everybody's name?" And I said, (laughs) "I don't know," but that was very important to me – to make this a friendly campus. And so when students came down from up North, which is not always friendly, and New York is not particularly friendly place, they would feel as though this was a warm place. But we also had a very terrible experience with a student. We had a student die in her dorm room and that was probably the most painful experience that I had here. And we had some other near death experiences in a sorority that – what was it? – binging, binge drinking issue, and that's always just horrible; those things are just so bad. And then we had an accident in a car after drinking involved with students, and so on. But then, you know there is always the other

side of it. The students that do great things - wonderful service - and we went out and built houses and so on. So, students were always very special to me.

WZ: Also under your leadership, the College became very active in the community. So can you share with us some of your experiences in that area?

RB: Well, I've always - I'm in education because I believe in building community - building our country through education - and I believe that everybody should be educated and we can improve by getting an education, but we have to bring the college and the community together. So we did a lot of work in the downtown community, in the Winter Park community, and we tried to bring people in so that we could have conversations about Winter Park and how our students were being integrated in the community. Because Winter Park is unique as you know; a couple of architects from Miami whom I gave honorary doctorates to said that what's special about Rollins is how it weaves itself into Winter Park as a community just seamlessly. You know, you go from one to the other so the College is an integral part of the community and vice-versa or as Sam Lawrence used to say "vicey versey." (laughs) Oh, and I particularly loved Fox Day. And now I did it differently; they are doing it differently now, but we never told anybody - Lorrie and I were the only people who knew - and we didn't order busses ahead of time, and we didn't - nobody knew anything, so it was a real surprise - even to me; I would get up and look at the television weather report and say, "Okay, let's do it today." And then it was just so much fun - the picnic and all of that - I loved that, loved it.

WZ: So you mentioned Lorrie. What are some of the people here that you worked with that you'd like to share with us.

RB: Well, Lorrie, you know Lorrie Kyle in the president's office? Well, she was my executive assistant and she's my greatest gift to Lewis, my successor. She's a wonderful human being, she's a graduate of the College, she's an advisor to the ODK, she's works harder than any human being I've ever known, and everybody loves her. She has no enemies and she is completely faithful to whomever - she's faithful to me, she's faithful to Lewis, she doesn't gossip either way, and she knows everything and knows everybody, and is just the perfect human being, (laughs) and so, she's a big part of my success. And Carol also, my secretary; and George Herbst was my chief financial officer, and he was - he and I worked really closely on all the architectural projects and he loves architecture and so do I, and design and so do I, so we spent a lot of hours on those issues; and I think those are the two people most special to me - and Annie Kerr - Annie went off - she was the chief advancement officer, vice president - and she was a lot of the reason George Cornell was so generous. She knew that I wanted an endowed chair for the presidency and she talked him into it. And she was the one who worked on him to give us the \$10 million to put us over the top. And he had two big dogs - George did - Samoyeds, very long hair, and I always disliked dogs. My mother said that I was knocked over by a big dog when I was little- I don't know - but we always faked love for these dogs. We even had a puppy party when one of them gave birth. But Annie was a smaller person than I, and she'd go in the house and (laughs) the dog would practically knock her down. It was huge dog, but she was wonderful. So I guess those three were the people - and there was certain faculty who I felt I was very close to.

WZ: So now looking back, how do you view your Rollins career of fourteen years?

RB: I loved it. I really loved the presidency and I loved the people, and I loved the students, and the faculty and the staff. You know staff people, it's very interesting, or even faculty – they come to me occasionally and say: Do you remember when you sat me down and you said this and that and you know you changed my life? And I didn't realize that I had that kind of impact and it's very humbling, you know, to think that people remember something that you said or something you did or something that was important to them, and that's special, so I loved it. I think the two hardest times I had were when that student died and 9/11, because 9/11 I had the television on at home, I saw what was happening, I was stunned, and my first impulse was that I had to get to campus. I had to get to campus because it was my people, and so I spent the day just walking, walking and working with the Chaplin to do something in chapel and the counselors to work with students; it was a very difficult time and it was probably the biggest stress time. Pat Powers, the Chaplin says about me – he always says, "Rita, you're at your best when we're at our worst," (laughs) but it does bring out something important in a president because you have to be responsible for the emotional well-being as well as the physical well-being of your people – of your campus. And so, I was very conscious of that – of needing to be a thoughtful healer, listener – but other than that, it was pretty great even with all the negative stuff that came up occasionally.

WZ: So how is retirement life?

RB: Ha! Who's retired? (laughs) Hum, you know me, having been this active all my life, I can't just stop; I don't know what I would do with myself. And my husband had the bad grace to die a few months after I retired. We would have had a lot of fun together; he was a great, great friend and confidant and just all around wonderful person. But, so I kept busy; I'm writing and I'm consulting and when anybody asks me to teach here, I do that or I work with students, or anything like that. I'm working with some non-profits in the community. Steve Neilson wanted me to meet with a woman he's working with at the zoo – the Sanford Zoo – and give them advice about fundraising and I do a lot of that. People think I know how to raise money. And I'm working in the community with the performing arts center to try and get that up and going. I'm politically much more active than I – I wasn't politically active at all when I was in the presidency because I didn't feel like I should be, because we needed everybody to support Rollins. But after a few years, I came out of the closet as a democrat – even a liberal democrat – and so I'm pretty active in politics now. I'm on the Board of the Association of Governing Boards in Washington, which deals with boards of colleges and universities, and I'm still on the Tupperware Board of Directors, and on the Board of the Performing Arts Center. And so, I am writing and consulting, so I stay pretty busy. And I have a lot of friends, so I do a lot of stuff socially.

AA: I read that your retirement came as a shock to the Rollins community. How did you know it was time for you to retire?

RB: Well, I wrote this book right here about legitimacy, and I was reading the galleys – you know before it's published, they send you the galleys – and I walked into my husband's study and I said, "Honey, you know it says here that you should leave while they still love you. Don't

stay too long. And maybe it's time for us to start thinking about it." And that's what – because I had done a lot of research and a lot of people said ten years is about enough time – and it was going to be fourteen years, so we made a decision. But when I announced it, there was a lot of – I was interested that several faculty had some teary eyes. And I had some teary eyes too; it was very hard for me to leave – I mean really hard for me to leave, but it was the right thing to do. I think institution needs to be refreshed, and they need new leadership even if it's going in the same direction. But it was hard, it was really, really, really hard.

WZ: Anything else that you would like to share with us?

RB: Well, one thing we didn't talk about – I don't want to take too much time but – as we've talked about in another context in the middle of my presidency, sort of, or in the first part, the digital world happened. You know, I think it was about 1995, would you say, when computers started coming in and all a sudden, we were going paperless. We thought we – everybody was talking about the fact that we didn't need to keep anything on paper anymore because we had it all digital. And that was a big – huge – shift; we started the I.T. Department; it became very big and important and to figure out how to get everybody up, and people had different kind of computers, so it was very confusing. And we stopped filing paper, until maybe a year later people started realizing that you needed the paper too. And so now we have a problem with archives (laughs) trying to figure out how preserve this stuff that's digital because paper – this stuff (points to note pad) – lasts even though it degrades a little bit – but we don't know what's going to happen to this kind of stuff (points to tape recorder). At some point I'm going to hand you this huge box. For example, I have a little – what do they call those things, those little things – cassette tape, where I was interviewed by Larry King on the radio in Miami; this was in 1975 or something about sex equity. "What is it?" he said. You know Larry King is famous, so it's a good thing to have, but you know, maybe people won't know how to transcribe a digital tape because we don't have the equipment. So it's going to be really interesting. But that was a major, major shift, and we had to start counseling faculty not to put their anger into emails (laughs) because they were discoverable in court cases. But that was a whole other thing, anyway.

AA: The way technology is going now, where do you picture higher education being in the next ten years?

RB: We're going to have a lot more online courses, we're going to have a lot more people interacting and doing research together through the Internet and collaborating a lot more – you know, it is shrinking the globe because, you know, you can do work now in collaboration with people anywhere. It doesn't really matter. And it changes the atmosphere of the college too – every institution because professors can spend more time working at home and you can reach them that way, so there is less face to face connection, and that's lost in many ways. So I think, we don't know yet – and people are going to – and I have a Kindle – I don't know about you all – so I do most of my reading on a Kindle – an electronic book, and I like it very much. So I think people are going to change their – I don't buy books anymore – you know, real books, like this (points to the books that she's written) – but I think that's going to change things, and all the iPads and iPods and things are going to really change the way we do businesses. Don't you think?

AA: I think so.

JR: Probably, but I'll miss real books.

RB: Well, yeah, I have lots of books at home – a big library.

AA: Do you plan to continue writing even though –

RB: You bet ya. Yeah, you bet ya. Yeah, I write on the computer – I love writing on the computer. I did my dissertation – I have a four-hundred and fifty page dissertation and I did it on a typewriter – can you imagine? I remember the whiteout, you know, and if I had any mistakes and the fear of losing it and all that. So, I just, I just love writing on the computer because I can go through and change things as I go along - and I don't know, it just seems like magic to me. I just love it. (laughs)

WZ: Well Dr. Bornstein, you are staying on the cutting edge, and we wish you the best.

RB: Thank you (laughs)

WZ: Thank you so much for your leadership and your contribution to Rollins College, and helping us preserve history of the College.

RB: Thank you, I've enjoyed it very much. Thanks to the students and to you, Wenxian. I appreciate it.